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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [UNSC](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: ITALIANS FOCUS ON LONG-TERM IN IRAQ, SEEK
US-UK-ITALY CONSULTS

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Classified By: Pol M/C David Pearce for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In meetings with the Deputy Senior Coordinator for Iraq Robert Deutsch, Italian government officials stressed the need for the continued involvement and commitment of the international community in Iraq. The Prime Minister's office suggested a UN Presidential statement would help underline that the December 15 election is part of a process laid out in UNSCR 1546. Though the Italian elections next spring were also on the minds of Italian officials, discussion of troop withdrawals was minimal; Center-Left politicians said they would never withdraw forces abruptly, as Spain had done. Instead, the Italians were focused on longer-term initiatives aimed at consolidating the political, economic, and security improvements in the country. On PRTs, the GOI was cautious but willing to explore avenues of cooperation. The destabilizing influences of both Iran and Syria were significant concerns. Both the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's office pressed for trilateral consultations among the US, UK, and Italy. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) During his December 5-7 visit to Rome, Deputy Senior Advisor/Deputy Senior Coordinator for Iraq Robert Deutsch briefed key Italian government officials responsible for Iraq, Center-Left leaders, and think tank analysts on political, security, and economic developments in the country, including the PRT initiative. On December 6, Deutsch met MFA Iraq Task Force Director Gherardo Lafrancesca and Desk Officer Stefano Stucci, as well as NATO Office Director Gianni Bardini, Middle East Development Cooperation Office Director Federica Ferrari Bravo, Desk Officer Guillermo Giordano, and MFA Iraq Consultant Lino Cardarelli. Lafrancesca, Stucci, and Ferrari Bravo also attended a dinner the same evening hosted by the DCM that included the MFA's Deputy Directors for the Middle East and Multilateral Political Affairs bureaus, Luca Del Balzo and Giacomo Sanfelice; Diplomatic Advisor to Defense Minister Martino, Achille Amerio; and Diplomatic Advisor to PM Berlusconi, Marco Carnelos. On December 7, Deutsch held a separate meeting with Carnelos and another senior Diplomatic Advisor to the PM, Francesco Talo. Deutsch also held discussions with Center-Left leaders and leading think tank analysts.

Optimism on the Political Front

[1](#)3. (C) Lafrancesca noted "some positive signals" on the political front, which he summarized as increased participation in the political process and inclusiveness. He said we should encourage more Sunni participation, citing the Arab League's involvement as a positive development. Lafrancesca said the EU election monitoring is developing well, and, although it will stay within the Green Zone, it will serve as a reference point for others. Talo highlighted the rule of law and better representation of all communities in the armed forces as two areas where the new government needed to make progress quickly. At the DCM's dinner, Del Balzo argued that the new government, as the first fully legitimate Iraqi government, should have the best possible leverage. Therefore, the international community should not get over-involved in the constitutional process and should let the new assembly take ownership of the process.

[1](#)4. (C) On the security front, Talo stressed the need for clear benchmarks in the transition process so that people can easily understand what "condition-based" withdrawal means. Until now, he said, the political process has been used to identify benchmarks, but after the elections, we will have to rely on a different type of calendar, one not based on dates. Bardini, stressing that training of Iraqi security forces must be a long-term commitment by the international community, said Italy would "not dislike" expansion of the NATO Training Mission (NTM-I), though it might be too soon to discuss this in the NAC. He suggested that eventually NATO could incorporate all training, including bilateral efforts and police training, into its mission.

[1](#)5. (C) Talo, noting that the upcoming months will be crucial

in internal Italian politics, said that Berlusconi continues to stress Italy's commitment to Iraq, not just because Italy is a US ally, but because Italy is a responsible partner in the international community and wants to see a democratic Iraq in the Middle East. Talo noted that the Berlusconi government's public diplomacy efforts distinguish between the military campaign against Saddam Hussein and post-conflict efforts. Its efforts also stress that all of the post-conflict UNSC resolutions have been adopted unanimously, i.e., with the support of countries that opposed the initial military intervention. Iraq has the support of the entire international community, Talo added. This was important for Italian public opinion, especially during an election year.

16. (C) Talo continued that, just as Italy refrained from participating in military operations against Iraq, it prefers to avoid bellicose language of any sort and therefore prefers to refer to a "success" strategy in Iraq rather than "victory," though in substance they are the same. Italy would make a statement congratulating the Iraqis on the upcoming elections, Talo said, though the timing and substance of the statement would be crafted so as not to affect the outcome of the elections. He suggested that the UN consider both a press release and a presidential statement to underline that the elections are the conclusion of a process laid out in UNSCR 1546. Talo further suggested that once the new Iraqi government is well-established, the UNSC should pass a resolution recognizing the new sovereign government. He urged early and intensive bilateral consultations on any new Iraq resolution.

Concerns about Iran and Syria

17. (C) All of Deutsch's interlocutors were interested in US views on the roles of Iran and Syria, with Iran clearly standing out as the GOI's main concern. At the MFA, Bardini commented that the Iranian presence is more and more pervasive, especially at the local level, in southern areas like Dhi Qar, where the Italian troops are located. At the PM's office, Talo noted that a succession of Iraqi PM-hopefuls had recently visited Tehran in apparent attempts to gain favor with their eastern neighbor. Noting Syria's failure to police its borders, Talo asked from which countries most insurgents originated and whether the US was pressuring those countries to control their borders. Deutsch acknowledged that Ambassador Khalilzad had been authorized to engage with his Iranian counterpart in Baghdad on limited issues relating to Iraq's stability, but stressed that Syria was being especially unhelpful in Iraq by allowing insurgents to enter through its borders. Most of the foreign insurgents, including most of the suicide bombers, had transited through Syria.

Mixed Feelings on PRTs

18. (C) The GOI officials were interested in the details of the PRT concept but expressed concerns that the PRTs not create the perception of backsliding on Iraqi sovereignty or continuation of foreign troop presence. Furthermore, they warned that PRTs could be a very visible target. At the MFA, Lafrancesca expressed mixed feelings, saying the GOI has concerns about creating new structures that create new security needs. Lafrancesca said it made sense to have a more coordinated civil-military presence. He asked whether an Italian-led PRT in Nasiriyah would fit into the US picture and whether it could be tailored to the specific needs of Dhi Qar province.

19. (C) Bardini stressed that Italy wanted to remain engaged in the whole range of assistance, and that PRTs might be the correct approach, though he was skeptical that the Afghanistan model -- Italy's frame of reference -- could be applied to Iraq. He said he understood that the PRTs' main focus would be on civilian issues, but warned that, unless the security situation improves, military aspects could end up prevailing. Furthermore, PRTs risked being viewed as permanent foreign structures, a negative signal that the coalition forces intended to stay on in changed guise. Bardini warned that the PRTs would be very visible targets and require substantial security protection.

110. (C) Deutsch responded to these concerns explaining that the PRTs would be US-led, that for security reasons they would be based on existing military installations rather than consulate-like settings, and that their purpose -- helping the regions get the economic assistance that the central government is not yet able to provide -- would be discussed with the local populations to get their buy-in. He confirmed that the US welcomed flexible approaches and foreign participation, noting that the three existing PRTs are tests cases, in part to see how the local population reacts. The purpose of the PRTs, he stressed, is to fill the gap left by the central government's inability to get aid to the provinces and to support the local governments through

capacity building. The PRTs would have no security functions other than ensuring their own security.

11. (C) PM Berlusconi's Diplomatic Advisors, noting the PRTs' relatively quick development in Iraq, said Italy is cautious but open to the concept. It would like to see a broader multilateral presence, in addition to Iraqi involvement. Talo added that contractor security is a controversial issue for Italy. (Comment. Italy, which leads three out of four modules of the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I), has long favored the use of Allied over contract security forces for the NTM-I. End comment.)

Economic Assistance Hindered by Security Conditions

12. (C) Lafrancesca said that Italy has spent 195 million of 200 million euros pledged at the Madrid Donors' Conference. He noted that MFA's Task Force Iraq has a small portfolio that it administers in Iraq, but that the bulk of MFA funds is administered by the Office of Development and Cooperation. Lafrancesca mentioned that the ministries of Environment and Culture also provide funds for water irrigation and museum restoration projects respectively. Unfortunately, Lafrancesca said, the bulk of Italy's assistance has been used for "emergencies" (read "security"); in the near future Italy hopes to turn more to long-term development cooperation, especially supporting institution-building, and the water, agriculture and health sectors. Lafrancesca also stressed the need to stimulate the Italian private sector's involvement in Iraq, noting that Cardarelli had recently visited Dhi Qar province to organize an upcoming mission for Italian companies. Lafrancesca concluded by saying the danger of working in Iraq remains prohibitively high for private Italian business.

13. (C) Ferrari Bravo spoke briefly about Italy's intention to provide soft loans to Iraq, especially for agriculture and infrastructure projects. To date Italy has set aside five million euros to reestablish the Iraqi meteorological system, essential to running airports. Italy cannot move forward with the loan, however, until the Iraqi Ministry of Finance signs a bilateral assistance agreement.

Next Steps: Trilateral Consultations with the UK

14. (C) The GOI officials were extremely appreciative of US efforts to continue consultations on the way forward in Iraq. In all of the meetings, they pushed for trilateral (US, UK, Italy) consultations, noting that they recently had also held bilateral discussions with the British.

Center-Left Denies Plans for "Zapatero" Troop Withdrawal

15. (C) Also on December 6, Deutsch briefed former Minister of Defense and Daisy party parliamentarian Sergio Mattarella and Democrats of the Left (DS) International Affairs Director Luciano Vecchi on US political and reconstruction policy in Iraq. Vecchi and Mattarella expressed appreciation for the briefing and Mattarella asked questions about the distribution of oil revenue in Iraq as a means of garnering support for the central government among various ethnic groups. Vecchi focused his questions on the ability of Shia leaders in southern Iraq to effectively govern the provinces in the absence of a coalition military presence. Deutsch responded that Shia leaders are learning democratic principles and that challenges remain both on the military and political fronts.

16. (C) On Center-Left plans for Italian troop deployments in Iraq in the event of a victory in the spring 2006 elections, Vecchi said that the Center-Left will call for the withdrawal of troops and establish a calendar for that withdrawal over an extended period of time. Deutsch cautioned as to the dangers of establishing dates for withdrawal given the fluid nature of developments in Iraq. Vecchi repeated comments previously made to Poloff (Ref B) that the calendar did not necessarily imply dates. Vecchi specifically said that the Center-Left, despite calls from radical elements in the coalition, would never withdraw in the way the Spanish did. He also said that a small military contingent could possibly remain to assist in police and other security training where he believes Italians have considerable expertise. He said that Italian civilian cooperation would certainly remain and might even increase.

17. (C) Deutsch participated in a December 6 roundtable discussion with leading think tank analysts hosted by the Aspen Institute. The group included former Italian Ambassador to Washington Ferdinando Salleo; Laura Mirachian (Italy's candidate to replace Paddy Ashdown as the UN High Representative for Bosnia); Stefano Silvestri, Director of the Institute for International Affairs and former Under Secretary of Defense; Karim Mezran, Director for the Center

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for American Studies; Carlo Jean, former military advisor to former President Cossiga; Lucio Caracciolo, Chief Editor of Limes (an Italian geopolitical review) and editorialist for La Repubblica; Monica Maggioni, TV journalist with state-run TGI; and Marta Dassu, Director of the Aspen Institute. The wide-ranging discussion focused mainly on internal political developments in Iraq (sectarianism and the role of the Kurds in keeping a united Iraq, the opposing influences of Iran and Al-Sistani on Shia fundamentalists, prospects for the Sunnis under a federal system, etc.) as well as external factors such as the evolving role of coalition forces, and the destabilizing influence of Syria and Iran.

18. (C) Comment: Deutsch's visit was timely and very much welcomed by GOI Iraq specialists who have routinely asked for more frequent intensive Iraq consultations. It follows up directly on the Secretary's undertaking to FM Fini for more Iraq consultations. The next step, in the GOI view, is trilateral US-UK-Italy discussions (Italy's troops serve in the UK sector). End comment.

19. (U) Deputy Senior Advisor Deutsch has cleared this cable.
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